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THE ROYAL NAVY AND LISBON: Malyn Newitt

Throughout the long eighteenth century British soldiers, diplomats, merchants and travellers passed through Lisbon describing again and again the daily scenes of that beautiful city. For some reason, the activities of the Royal Navy and its personnel have largely escaped scholarly attention. The Royal Navy began to use Lisbon as a regular base for its operations in the War of the Spanish Succession (1703-13). Thereafter Royal Navy ships were constantly to be found at anchor in the Tagus, with their officers and men forming a distinctive section of the British community in Lisbon.

Sailors, as is well known, have 'a wife in every port', a saying which both describes the realities of life for many seamen and provides a symbolic statement about their cultural identity.

The crews of the Royal Navy, and still more those of the merchant fleet, were drawn from many nationalities, religions and ethnic groups; the ships were a pluralistic, and in some respects egalitarian, society afloat. On board ship differences were tolerated and even celebrated that on shore would have separated and divided. Seamen thus became cultural mediators, carrying exotic customs and beliefs as well as exotic artefacts with them as they moved around the globe. To some extent this was also true of the officers who found that in foreign ports the domestic restraints of correct social behaviour could be modified in interesting ways.

The three men whose lives are sketched below are representative of their tribe - an aristocratic vice-admiral of the Blue, an

ordinary midshipman and a press-ganged black slave. None of the three expected the details of their lives to become public and although the admiral's memoirs were eventually published in 1953, the diaries of the midshipman have never been published and are not widely known. All travel narratives are to a greater or lesser extent the product of the writer's imagination but naval officers were trained to keep logs containing factual observation and an unembellished record of events, so that it may not be too fanciful to see in the direct, simple and unadorned style of their writing both an adherence to their naval training and a respect for the truth.

In 1774 vice-admiral Augustus Hervey became third Earl of Bristol and inherited the magnificent mansion of Ickworth near Bury St Edmunds. Twenty years earlier, as captain of a ship of the line he had visited Lisbon on numerous occasions and left a unique and intimate record of his experience of Lisbon high society. Hervey had access to all the noble households and describes visits to the Patriarch and to the Court where he became friends with the royal family. Although entrusted with important business for the navy, he remembered Lisbon primarily as a land of amorous opportunity where he and other young foreign aristocrats could carry on their affairs free from responsibility and consequence. His memoirs show Portuguese high society mirrored in a series of escapades and conquests – a picture every bit as vivid as that provided by William Beckford whose romantic homosexual tastes uncovered another and quite different layer to Portuguese aristocratic culture.⁷⁴

Hervey first visited Lisbon in 1737 and in 1748 paid his first visit to the notorious nunnery at Odivelas which “had 700 pro-

⁷⁴ - Boyd Alexander ed., *The Journal of William Beckford in Portugal and Spain 1787-1788*, Rupert Hart Davis (London, 1954)

fessed nuns in it, and as many novices, servants and others... The late king had two mistresses in this convent, and a child by each.”⁷⁵ At Odivelas he found there were older women who managed the affairs of the younger nuns and who were prepared to pimp for a young English nobleman. He took advantage of the services of these women on a number of occasions, confiding to his diary how at church one day he saw a “very fine country girl... and got Magdalena to get her for me some days afterwards, and a lovely piece she was.”⁷⁶

On other occasions he conducted his own affairs, going one night together with the Spanish Duke de Bagnos and, it appears, the Comte de Vergennes, later famous as France's foreign minister, to visit “upwards of, I verily believe, thirty ladies houses – ladies of pleasure, I mean.” One lady in Lisbon “I attacked in the Portuguese manner by going in my great Portuguese coat constantly under her window”.⁷⁷ He claims to have had some success with the teenage daughters of his hosts and reflects that Portuguese husbands are “very jealous and very watchful... which makes the strictest of them have their wives and daughters chiefly fall a sacrifice to their upper servants.”⁷⁸

In September 1753 he was back in Lisbon where he met Pitt's sister – “very clever, but mad” – and where he described an escapade with all the embellishment traditionally given by memoir writers to their amorous adventures. One night his chaise was stopped by a horseman who persuaded Hervey to accompany him to a mysterious *quinta* where he was received by a lady “of a very fine stature, fine hair, fine teeth and eyes, much painted

⁷⁵ - David Erskine ed., *Augustus Hervey's Journal* Chatham Publishing (London, 2002). Originally published by W.Kimber (London, 1953), p.75

⁷⁶ - *Ibid* p.122

⁷⁷ - *Ibid* p.76

⁷⁸ - *Ibid* p.123

after the Portuguese manner". The woman began to make love to him and although "it appeared all a dream to me... those sensations soon began to get the better of all the others, as they were ever ready enough to do with me". He stayed till four in the morning, refusing her gift of a diamond ring. On returning home he explained to his mistress, "I had been at play and lost my money"⁷⁹ – a metaphor indeed, whether or not he was fully aware of the significance of his language. Eventually, after many repeat visits, Hervey discovered that this secret lover was none other than the Duchess of Cadaval.⁸⁰

Hervey never mixed with members of the Factory if he could help it. In 1752 he escorted Lord Tyrawley who had been sent to deal with the complaints of the Factory and who denounced its members as "a set of dissatisfied, restless, proud and extravagant fellows". The interests of the navy and the Factory frequently came into conflict and Hervey observed that the members of the Factory

"are in general very unreasonable in their demands, and yet think, in some things, the Portuguese are endeavouring to prejudice the trade with them... and who can blame them [the Portuguese] for wanting to save a very great part of the balance of that trade that is against them."

And then, with the hauteur of an aristocrat, "our merchants here live much more expensive than their principals in London; they game very much and very high, and no wonder the trade cannot support their extravagance."⁸¹

79 - *Ibid* p.152

80 - *Ibid* p.167

81 - *Ibid* p.121

Although the navy badly needed to maintain its access to Lisbon, all the ships participated in what was the greatest smuggling operation of the day – the shipping of gold bullion out of Portugal. Like most navy captains Hervey openly flouted Portuguese laws and simply took the gold coin remitted by merchants on board his ship. "I got a very good freight," he concluded in 1748, "about 80,000 *moidores*, and then sailed for England". In February 1753 he took 63,533 *moidores* on board refusing to lower his commission to half a percent as "such a step might affect the whole corps".⁸² Taking illegal bullion on board provided nice returns for Royal Navy captains and the Factory had to resort to hard bargaining to get their money out of the country. For all his friendship with the Portuguese royal family, Hervey could nevertheless be quite high-handed when it pleased him, not only flouting Portuguese laws on the export of bullion but on one occasion, having helped an English captain avoid arrest "for a former affair of his boat's crew with regard to money", had the officer in charge of one of the Tagus forts arrested for allegedly failing to salute and firing a shot at his ship.

For the Royal Navy Lisbon was an important base for its operations in the Mediterranean and the close, friendly, and sometimes intimate, relations which an aristocratic captain like Hervey maintained with the nobility and royal family of Portugal was the real cement of the Anglo-Portuguese alliance. In Hervey's memoirs the Royal Navy is the vital mediator, imposing limits on the pretensions of the Factory while maintaining close relations with the Court and even providing vital naval intelligence for the king, Dom José, who liked to accompany British ships leaving the Tagus in his yacht.

82 - *Ibid* p.143

Captain Edward Pellew was just as high-handed but in a rather different way. Pellew, who later won fame and the title of Viscount Exmouth for his bombardment of Algiers in 1816, had worked his way up in the navy with a series of heroic single ship actions and exhibitions of personal bravery. Like other British captains he had often visited Lisbon when travelling to and from stations in the Mediterranean and in 1795 was anchored in the Tagus in command of the newly converted frigate *Indefatigable*. It appears that Pellew and his officers went ashore and, like Hervey before them, attended the Lisbon opera. There Pellew's attention was drawn to a young black violinist in the opera orchestra. Apparently Pellew had "long wanted for the frigate a good violin player, to furnish music for the sailor's dancing...a recreation high favourable to the preservation of their good spirits and contentment".⁸³ So he ordered the crew of his boat to waylay the black violinist when he left the opera house after the performance and to "kidnap him, violin and all, and take him off to the ship." This was duly done and *Indefatigable* sailed the next day.

The black violinist was José António Emidy who was twenty years old at the time. Emidy had been born in West Africa and taken as a slave to Brazil. There he had been trained as a musician in one of the *casas grandes* and had accompanied his master to Lisbon where he had found employment in the Lisbon opera house as a violinist. That Pellew thought he was in his rights to kidnap a member of the opera orchestra speaks volumes for the assumption of Royal Navy officers that in time of war they could take any measures they chose to man their ships. It also, of course, says a great deal about the attitude of these officers towards Britain's 'oldest ally'.

83 - For the account of Emidy's life I have relied on Richard McGrady, 'Joseph Emidy: an African in Cornwall', *The Musical Times*, November (1986) pp.619-22. The quotation comes from James Silk Buckingham, *Autobiography*, Longman (London, 1855) reprinted by McGrady.

Once on board the *Indefatigable* Emidy was expected to play "hornpipes, jigs and reels" for the crew. Emidy hated this new servitude and "as the captain and officers judged, from his conduct and expressions, that he was intensely disgusted with his present mode of life, and would escape at the first possible opportunity, he was never permitted to set his foot on shore for seven long years".⁸⁴ In January 1799 Pellew was appointed captain of the *Impetueux* and paid off the crew of his frigate in Falmouth. Emidy found himself in a remote Cornish seaport, ashore for the first time in four years (not seven as his biographer says).

Emidy, however, was a great survivor having already experienced the 'middle passage' and life in the wartime Royal Navy where he had endured battles at sea, near shipwreck and mutiny. In Cornwall he began to give music lessons, one of his pupils being his future biographer, James Silk Buckingham, who went to him to learn the flute as he was "the only teacher procurable at Falmouth." Buckingham writes that he was "an exquisite violinist, a good composer...who taught equally well the piano, violin, violoncello, clarinet, and flute."⁸⁵ Emidy himself, in an advertisement in 1820, claimed also to teach the tenor and bass viol, guitar and Spanish guitar and to tune harps and pianos. By that time he was much in demand as a musician playing for the Falmouth Harmonic Society and gaining a reputation as a composer – in 1808 a violin concerto composed by him was played at a concert to celebrate the king's birthday. Emidy's fame spread. There was talk of concerts in London and he married a Cornish woman, had a family and settled down. He died in 1835.

84 - *Ibid*

85 - *Ibid*

Falmouth had always had close links with Lisbon – indeed the passage to and fro of the Falmouth packet (usually loaded with contraband) meant they were almost twin cities, but Emidy's extraordinary story is witness to a degree of cultural exchange between the world of the Portuguese Atlantic and that of maritime Cornwall which in the end owed most to the networks created by the Royal Navy.

Midshipman Dawson's sunny narrative of his life at sea during the years after the Napoleonic Wars has never been published nor made much use of by naval historians.⁸⁶ Serving on board the *Tigris* in 1817, he transferred to *Spartan* in 1818 his cruises taking him to Algiers, Gibraltar, Vera Cruz and the British West Indies before he was sent to Lisbon in 1820 to escort Marshal Lord Beresford to Rio. Dawson has all the cheery openness to experience and adventure that was common with young naval officers and was always ready with his pencil to make little sketches in his journal.

When the *Spartan* arrived in the Tagus in March 1820 there was delay in granting her permission to move up river and Dawson comments that this was an attempt by the Minister of War (Dom Miguel Forjaz) to assert his authority over the British. As captain Wise prepared to move without formal permission, the leave was hastily granted to avoid a confrontation.

Going ashore the midshipmen found a hotel run by an English woman where they could obtain dinner and hire horses. They then set out to view the aqueduct. Dawson was huge-

86 - The Diary of AC Dawson are located in the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI) DOD 618 36B. The diary is contained in a leather bound notebook with the word Astronomy mysteriously printed on the cover. On the first page is written "A.C. Dawson March 19th 1817" and on the facing page "H.M.S. Tigris Private Remarks made by A.C. Dawson. From June 1817 to 13 January 1818. H.M.S. Spartan. From Jan 13th to 3rd Dec [1820]". The first entry is actually dated 23 August. All references are to the numbered pages of the diary.

ly impressed by this structure and commented that a line of battleship could pass under the central arch. The midshipmen climbed to top of the water course and bathed their faces in the cold clear stream. The young men returned for a game of billiards and their own form of gambling which was to draw lots for who would pay the bill.

These midshipmen were tourists, looking for bargains and souvenirs, careful of their money, but keen to have a good time. However, times had changed and there is no hint of the kind of good time that Augustus Hervey sought in eighteenth century Lisbon. Dawson paid a visit to the opera where he failed to see any pretty girls and, although he admired the female dancers thought they all had "large feet and thick ankles". Ruefully he admitted that "perhaps the stile of beauty that may please the Portuguese would not please me".⁸⁷ Later in Rio he noted that the female dancers "wore flesh coloured drawers [tights?] so that they appeared almost naked".⁸⁸ Rio also featured an entertainment the midshipmen were determined not to miss. It was a bullfight in which an English woman, Mrs Southby, was due to appear to fight one of the bulls. Dawson's description deserves at least a footnote in any history of *tauromaquia*.

"Everyone was anxious for the appearance of Mrs Southby. She came in at last mounted Portuguese fashion on a horse she could not manage. The bull was then let out and several men who were in the ring attempted in vain to aggravate him by throwing darts at him made of a long piece of wood with a small spike in the end of it. One of them had a fine hoist over the palasade into the pit. The [bull] caught him before he could get over out of his way and

87 - *Ibid* p. 104

88 - *Ibid* p. 111

helped him up. Mrs Southby was as much afraid of the bull as the bull was of her and that was not a little. Mrs S now went off without even touching the bull..."⁸⁹

The Praça do Comércio with the equestrian statue of Dom José was much admired and Dawson relates how French soldiers in Junot's army plucked out the gilt eyes of the horse for the sake of the gold they contained. A visit to São Roque on a Sunday led to an incident of a kind that was no doubt repeated many times in the long history of the English in Portugal, as religion often proved to be the greatest cause of cultural friction.

"The priest went through a great many ceremonies which neither the people nor I understood. We were standing in the middle of the centre aisle and all the people round us were kneeling. As we stood we heard ourselves addressed in very good English and told that it would be more decent if we knelt in church, but thinking the lady's object in making the remark was only to attract attention we did not mind her..."⁹⁰

Whereas Hervey had sought entertainment in the convents and houses of the nobility, Dawson and his companions frequented coffee houses which they first discovered when seeking shelter from a shower of rain. The cigars he found were good and cheap but

"one cannot get Havanna cigars here as there is one person who pays four or five million dollars for the monopoly of the tobacco trade for Lisbon and he of course will allow none but his own tobacco to be used and it is said that he

89 - *Ibid* p. 116

90 - *Ibid* p. 101

pays his contract by the seizures he makes".⁹¹

As these short biographical excerpts suggest, the navy, its captains, midshipmen and sailors had their own special relationship with Portugal and with the port-city of Lisbon which they frequented almost as if it were a home port. In a very real sense it was they who sustained the Anglo-Portuguese alliance when the greed, arrogance and ill temper of the members of the Factory seemed constantly to place it in danger.

91 - *Ibid* p. 102